(b) whether the External Affairs Minister of Pakistan has said so in an interview to the BBC World News Service;

(c) whether he has also sent any communication to Government in that connection; and

(d) if so, the reaction of Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI KAMLA SINHA): (a) and (b) Government have seen media reports in this regard.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) The dialogue with Pakistan has been resumed at the Foreign Secretary level and, following the last round of discussions in Islamabad, a Joint statement was issued which envisages discussions on "peace and security" issues.

Keeping India's Nuclear option open

2515. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether in view of the recent US nuclear test and test firing of Hatf-III missiles by Pakistani, India have decided to keep open its nuclear options and the Agni missile programme;

(b) whether the Indian nuclear programme has fully developed technical capability in all requirement of the nuclear test cycle and whether our defence preparedness is upto the "marks"; and

(c) what is Governments reaction to participation in Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty negotiation to be held in Geneva?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI KAMLA SINHA): (a) and (b) Indias nuclear programme is extensive and exclusively geared towards peaceful purposes. Government remains fully committed to taking all necessary measures designed to cope with any threat that may be posed to the security of the nation. High priority is to be accorded to the next phase of the Agni programme, including efforts to augment its range.

(c) India has consistently called for a universal verifiable ban on production of fissionable material for weapons purpose and believes that a multilaterally negotiated, universally applicable and non-discriminatory treaty banning the production of fissile materials for weapon purposes should be part of a step by step process of global nuclear disarmament aimed at achieving the complete elimination of all nuclear weapons within a specified time frame.

Delay in the examinations in Salem Medical College

2516. SHRI SUSHILKUMAR SAMBHAJIRAO SHINDE:

SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA.

SHRI RAJUBHAI A. PARMAR:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the new-item published in the Indian Express (New Delhi edition) dated July 6, 1997 under the caption, "1991 batch yet to take first MBBS exam in Salem College".

(b) if so, whether it is a fact that the first batch of MBBS students of Vinayaga Mission's Kirupananda Variyar Medical College, Salem, admitted in 1991, are still waiting to write their MBBS first year examination, while students admitted to the course in later years have completed the course; and

(c) under what circumstances such a situation has arisen and what steps are being taken to help students of the 1991 batch to complete the course?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY): (a) to (c) Yes, Sir. An application was received